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BELLIGERENT DISCUSSION AND TRUTH-SEEKING.

IT is a sign of the times, and a most encouraging one, that polemical writing is losing caste. If seriously attempted, the classical attempt to "refute" a doctrine produces a smile to-day. The animus of the heresy trial is apt to return like a boomerang upon those who undertake it. All this is as it should be. Yet it sometimes seems as if the pendulum had swung so far the other way that people were beginning to distrust their capacity for profitable discussion on any terms. Many a discussion is little better than a wrangle, and to some persons all discussion seems to be practically such. On the other hand, there are few who cannot remember certain talks with old friends when insight seemed to advance more than in months of lonely thinking. Sometimes discussion is pure gain to all concerned, and makes us feel as if we could never get enough of it. For discussion is only thinking writ large, and we can scarcely give it up unless we are to give up thinking altogether. A group of friends can make up their group-mind precisely as a solitary thinker makes up his individual mind. The different sides of the question which in solitary thinking are turned over and considered within a single brain may be represented each by a single speaker. When thinking alone there is always danger that we may forget altogether to consider certain important aspects of the question, or that, from want of definite expression, the whole thing may be so murky and dim that the actual collisions or re-enforcements, the relative proportions and places of the different parts, may escape us. But get each view represented by a living companion and the resulting division of labor is as effective as in manufactures, or in a court of justice. We have decided that, as a rule, the court can make up its mind better if the pros and cons which the jury would otherwise have to remember and consider for themselves are impersonated by separate individuals,—the

prosecuting and defending attorneys and the judge,—each of whom is responsible, like any specialist, for a certain portion of the problem in hand, and undertakes to present what is to be said from a given point of view. This method works so well that it is sometimes applied too literally to ordinary discussion. But in satisfactory discussions the general principle of division of labor is supplemented by the stimulating effect of mind on mind. We think more clearly when we have to present and defend our views in speech or writing, and the simple statement of a view contrasting with our own often sets our mental machinery humming in a most gratifying way.

Discussion, then, is not at all likely to be given up, and in studies other than philosophical there does not seem to be any dissatisfaction felt corresponding to our increasing distrust of philosophical polemics. Students of pedagogy, for instance, are constantly converting one another, modifying and enlarging each other's views, and getting from one another an increased power to deal effectively with the problems before them. But it is the rarest thing in the world to hear of a philosopher's conversion. Need this be so? What is it that makes one discussion more profitable than another?

In attempting to answer these questions, I shall simply state the results of the personal experience of one inveterately fond of discussion. In my own experience it has appeared that discussions have been satisfactory and instructive to all concerned in proportion as the following beliefs have been more or less unconsciously acted on:

1. That the essence of proof is exemplification or a reference to experience common to the disputants.
2. That all dissent should take the form of an attempt to reinterpret in a more comprehensive way the common experience under discussion.
3. That no opinion can be criticised adversely unless it has been understood so thoroughly that one feels decidedly tempted to adopt it; while, on the other hand, no opinion can be supported by one who has not felt the objections to it so strongly that he is tempted to reject it.

4. That there are many important views of life which we cannot hope to understand without a pretty complete knowledge of their relations to the rest of the life of him who holds them.

5. That our instinctive aversion towards an opinion which differs from our own is not infrequently strong just in proportion to our ignorance of its actual significance, and that, hence, such natural hostility should be discounted in advance.

6. That we should attempt no paraphrase of an opponent's views, except in such phrases as we genuinely believe he might himself use.

7. That in characterizing another's doctrine we should never affix such adjectives as "mere," "bare," "dead," "brute," "abstract," and the like to his expressions (*e.g.*, "mere, dead atoms," "pure abstract idealism," etc.).

I believe in these rules chiefly because I have seen them work well, and accordingly my argument consists of attempts to exhibit their working in contrast with that of other rules followed (as before, unconsciously) by the participants in many current philosophical discussions spoken or written. I shall now try to exemplify each of them.

I.

For purposes of discussion the essence of proof is exemplification.

Obviously there can be no rational discussion without a common topic; there must be a set of experiences common to the disputants, which they try by discussion to interpret and understand. No doubt, all of us have been through the irritating experience of finding at the end of a long discussion that our opponent has been talking of one thing and we of another. I have seen two men come almost to blows in supposed disagreement about temperance, only to discover in the end that one of them *disbelieved* in temperance, supposing it to signify total abstinence from alcoholic drinks, while the other *believed* in it in the sense of moderate use of alcohol. One was talking of abstinence, the other of moderation. They

agreed entirely in their conduct, and differed only in words. But my present point is that they never *intended* to talk of different things, else their discussion could never have arisen.

But what is there in discussion besides an announcement of the subject? I should say that in the most profitable discussions we do nothing but describe or point to the topic in such a way that certain less obvious aspects of it become clearer to all concerned. In relatively unprofitable discussions we do a great deal else, but wherever much progress in thought is made we find (according to my experience) that the words and opinions of the disputants are much like *gestures of pointing*. They are like the motions of a showman as he points out the less obvious characteristics of an animal to a knot of interested spectators. As he points, they look on and verify or modify his descriptions of the parts. They see the end of the elephant's trunk, which the showman says is like a finger, but they comment to themselves that it would be a very short and flabby finger.

Similarly, in trying to convince any one on a topic in philosophy, most first-rate disputants begin by getting clearly before the audience a case of what they mean. In the twenty-sixth chapter of his "Psychology," Professor James describes to us the state of mind of a man who is trying to decide about getting out of bed on a cold morning. This is to illustrate the doctrine of the Will, and the description is so good that the case is before us as vividly as though it were a patient wheeled into a medical lecture-room to illustrate the lecturer's views. "The nature of Will is such a thing as *there* occurs," Professor James might say, and we can hardly fail to understand him, for all his arguments are gestures. The kind of metaphor used shows a persistent attempt to keep the concrete facts clearly before the audience. This "*obviously*" is so and so—this is *evident*, this you *see*, we call your *attention* to this. By derivation, an illustration is that which "lights up" or makes clear; a *demonstration* is a "*pointing out*" (evidently with the showman's gesture in view); proof is a "*testing*" or "*sampling*," while "*exemplify*" is a word which goes back to

the movement of a buyer who picks up an article to test it that he may judge of its value.

But derivative meanings are often superseded, and I rest my argument for the statement that proof is exemplification on an appeal to any one's experience with successful and unsuccessful discussions. Is it not true that the successful and profitable arguments have been those where the appeal to examples was frequent and skilful? Our friends who were disputing as to "Temperance" would have got down to business much quicker, had either of them given a case of what he meant. The whole misunderstanding would thus have been avoided, for their meaning—what they cared about—was identical. To begin by defining our terms is tedious and often impracticable. It may create as many misunderstandings as it removes, for the terms used in the definition need defining themselves. But a case or a story defines our symbols very easily. I do not mean an allegory, or an analogy, but an incarnation of the principle itself.

In his brilliant essay on "Education," Mr. J. J. Chapman says of Froebel: "His intention was so concentrated upon fact" (the facts of children's development) "that his terminology does not mislead. It can be translated into the language of metaphysics, of Christian theology, or of modern science, and it remains incorruptibly coherent.* What an oasis is an illustration in the pages of a difficult writer! Eagerly we scan the horizon till we see one, struggle along to it, and when we reach it we get strength to go on. In Hegel, an illustration is like the first gulp of air to the diver as he rises to the surface after a long submersion. And yet, with any writer who is alive and earnest, the doctrines he preaches are the reflex of his experiences. Often one wishes he would give us the experience and leave out the doctrine. Emerson's account of a preacher who thought to prove without exemplification is very typical of what I mean. "A snow-storm was falling around us. The snow-storm was real, the preacher merely spectral. . . . He had lived in vain. He had no one word in-

* "Causes and Consequences," by John J. Chapman (Scribner), p. 84.

timating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended or cheated or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it." (Divinity Hall Address.)

It may be said that in pure deductive reasoning or logical construction, illustrations are not needed; but I think the illustrations are still there, though in a slightly different form. In proving a proposition in geometry, what we do is to point out by diagrams and other devices certain aspects of the axioms which at first sight are less obvious than the axioms themselves. This is just what the showman does with his elephant, or the psychologist with his case of will.

Again, when one shows a statement to be self-contradictory what one does is to exhibit its failure to *work* when actually applied to a case. Thus, if our opponent makes the statement: "There exists an unknowable Being or Force," the attempt to show that this is self-contradictory naturally begins with some such question as this: "What makes you think so?" or "How do you know it?" The answer must contain some appeal to a case in point and the original proposition is thus upset, since it appears that in practice one knows a good deal about the unknowable.

Or, once more, to deduce a corollary from a principle is to exhibit a new or unfamiliar *working* of the principle, as is done in the second term of a syllogism. If the Monroe Doctrine be that no aggression of European powers in the United States is to be tolerated—the corollary, "The Venezuela boundary-dispute must be submitted to arbitration," is deduced *via* the decision that England's action in the matter is an example, or illustration of aggression such as the Monroe Doctrine means.

The examples given in the last few pages are what I mean when I say that in profitable discussions all proof is essentially exemplification. In Professor Royce's recent paper on the "Psychology of Invention,"* he says, "These experiments do not indeed prove, but do in miniature illustrate a thesis

* *The Psychological Review*, 1898.

whose proof I should leave to the whole history of invention." Here, obviously, proof means only the results of *more* illustrations upon the mind. The history of invention is to complete the proof by the accumulation of supplementary illustrations. In a similar sense I should say that the proof of my thesis that demonstration is illustration is to be left to the *whole history of discussion*, out of which I have selected certain bits which seemed suggestive of the rest.

II.

In progressive or convincing discussions, all dissent from another's views takes the form of an attempt to reinterpret, in a way more comprehensive than his, the common experience which is under consideration.

When a person says, "I understand your meaning perfectly, but I differ from it entirely," we can only take his words to signify this: "I see what you mean, but I think it badly expressed," or "Your meaning does not reach me at all."

If these latter phrases express dissent, why then dissent has a most vital function to perform in all discussion. But any other kind of dissent, any dissent which is of the type of the classic "refutation," or which implies that any view can be totally false or meaningless, does not exist, so far as I know, in the kind of discussion that widens mental horizons and nourishes character.

I remember a lady who repeatedly expressed the belief that all men are cross before dinner. What are we to do with a statement like this? The most useless thing that we could do would be to dissent and call it false. There must be some meaning there behind the words, some experience badly described. Inquiry showed that the lady in question was a person cut off by the nature of her duties from all masculine society except that of her husband and her son, both of whom were usually cross when their stomachs were empty. This was what she meant, as, on questioning, she admitted. From her meaning I could not dissent. Her facts were facts, and it was these she had in mind. It is easy to say: "The mean-

ing is the inference, the personal reaction upon the facts, and thus may be wholly false and deserving of our hearty dissent." But with serious people it is rarely true, I think, that the meaning is all in the inference. A serious man "means business;" he means to state the truth, and means that you should get behind both his words and his inference to the facts he is trying to express. There is no occasion for going to the dictionary and trying to read the man's meaning out of the definitions of his words, for it is not *the* words but *his* words that you wish to understand. His words are a piece of the expression of his life, to be understood not in their isolated, dictionary signification, but, so far as may be, as he uses them, or as a part of him. He genuinely sees something and we have got to see it too, if we are to get his meaning. After that, we can consider the question of terms and adopt his language or make him adopt a better. In the same fine essay, from which I have already quoted, Mr. Chapman says,—

"If you wish to convince a man that you are right, concede that from his point of view he is right; *then move the point*, and he follows." (Italics mine.) To "move the point" we must first *get* it entirely; we must assimilate and, so far, adopt it. Then we are in a position to move it, and to dissent, in so far as moving it implies dissent. But this is not very far. You can only oppose that which offers resistance, and if you entirely understand a point of view before you try to move it, you and your opponent will progress together and without opposition against the common enemy,—ignorance.

Swift * writes that once, when half asleep, he fancied that he could not go on writing unless he first put out some water which he had taken into his mouth. Here there is so obviously some mistake that one could hardly be tempted to take the words literally or dissent from them. A moment's thought shows that they meant a fact,—namely, the fact that he could not *speak* without first emptying his mouth.

This is an extreme case of the sort of misunderstanding which, in less obvious forms, underlies a large percentage of

* Quoted by Bosanquet, "Essays and Addresses," p. 192.

the disagreements among philosophers. Sometimes the difference is little more than a matter of terms, and yet leads to a good deal of waste of time and strength. Mr. Bosanquet tells of a discussion between two theologians which presumably was long and heated until at last a thought flashed upon one of them and he exclaimed, "Oh, I see, my dear sir; your *God* is my *devil*!" After that understanding was possible.

If I am right in what I have been saying, our position is this: we may understand a man's meaning, or we may fail to understand it, or we may not feel clear as to whether we understand it or not. If we understand it, we have possession of the facts, or the kind of facts, which he sees, and can differ from him only as to the best method of "boxing them up for shipment from mind to mind." (Phillips Brooks.)

If we do not get at the facts on which his argument rests, we do not understand *his* argument, though we may know the dictionary meaning of every word and be able to parse the sentences. If we do not understand him, or are not sure whether we do or not, of course we can neither agree nor differ.

III.

No opinion should be criticised adversely, unless one feels decidedly tempted to adopt it, nor can any opinion be reasonably supported by any one who does not believe himself to feel the full force of the objections to it.

We all of us recognize the *naïveté* of any attempt to support a doctrine like, say, that of "innate ideas," without recognizing the obvious objections to it. It is like going into a modern naval battle in a dory, with bows and arrows for artillery. But we may fail to see the equal absurdity of attacking a doctrine in which we see no considerable truth. The figure of the straw man who is then our adversary ought to rise before our minds. In presence of any serious argument that seems to upset or contradict our own, or to be devoid of meaning, our first duty is to understand it; our second is to understand it; our third is to understand it. We have no other concern. This, of course, applies only to serious dis-

cussion, in which our companions are presumably as sane as we are, and as desirous of reaching the truth about the matter in hand. Otherwise, discussion is a farce. And yet in practice it is rare to hear or read a discussion in which none of the arguments imply that the "opponent's" opinion is a riddle with no answer, an utter mystery, a "*Ding an sich.*"

Some years ago I wrote a college thesis in criticism of Professor Royce's ethical system. That thesis seems to me today a very fine example of the wrong way to criticise,—the way which condemns a view without having ever personally experienced its force. "Remember that the opponent's view is convincing to him, and should be at least plausible to you."*

In the thesis to which I refer I have the best of reasons for knowing that I was judging adversely something the meaning of which I never had seen. I had read over many times the pages which I criticised, but never with any attempt at sympathetic comprehension. Instead of that, I pointed out with great glee seventeen respects in which I held that Professor Royce had contradicted himself. As I look over that thesis now, I see that not only did I fail to get an inkling of his meaning, but that I never for a moment attempted to do so. I was too busy warding off what I took to be attacks upon my own beliefs. To believe my own truth, I thought it necessary to knock over everybody else's.

A classical example of this attitude is to be seen in the long controversy which took place in the English magazines some years ago between Professor Huxley and the Duke of Argyle. To me the most striking thing about the contest was the absence of any attempt on either side to understand the other's meaning. It was "sparring for points" throughout,—efforts to raise a laugh at the opponent's expense, to put him in an uncomfortable position, to show his utter absurdity, insincerity, and incompetence. Apparently no suspicion crossed either combatant's mind that his opponent meant facts of some kind, and must have some sort of human expe-

* I think this sentence is from a lecture by Professor G. H. Palmer.

rience behind his words. Oh, no ! The opponent was always assumed to be a "*Ding an sich*" whom it was out of the question to understand, and who was to be crushed and forgotten as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Such judgments argue the incompetence of the critic, for they always prove too much. They prove not simply that the opponent's doctrine is mistaken, but that he has no doctrine at all : that his words are the babblings of one temporarily insane or wilfully blind to truth, which, of course, reduces the criticism to an absurdity.

In literary criticism it is fast getting to be an accepted canon that one cannot criticise an author unless one likes him. No one would think he could understand and judge a character in history without feeling the force of the motives that moulded his life. The scientific observer does not go at stubborn new facts with a club to crush them into submission. The translator does not try to "refute," terrify, or abash his text; yet it would be hardly more unreasonable for him to do so than for a philosopher to treat his opponent's opinions as "essentially false." Huxley was probably not very seriously tempted to hold the Duke of Argyle's position. He was like the schoolmaster, of whom Hegel tells, who gravely pointed out to his scholars the wicked selfishness of Alexander's vaulting ambition, and compared it with his own unselfishness in forbearing to conquer the East.

There is the same element of incompetent self-righteousness about any man who ventures to condemn as false a doctrine which he is not tempted to believe. The opponent's opinions are to the philosopher what the facts are to the scientist, the records to the historian, the text to the translator. They are something to work at, something to take in and find a place for, if possible; if not, they are "some of our failures," as Beau Brummel's vâlet said of the cravats he could not tie.

It may be thought that I have mistaken the vocation of the philosopher, and conceived it as too nearly akin to that of the student of history, or of natural science. "The scientific man has his definite facts before him to which he is subordinate, to

which he can constantly refer, and his whole work is to record, not to judge. But philosophy deals with opinions, with abstract ideas, general conceptions and universal truths, rather than with particular facts. It rises above them, and is to be judged rather by its inner self-consistency than by its correspondence with facts."

There is no doubt that many have attempted to work at philosophy in this way, and have brought it into disrepute thereby. The popular idea that the philosopher lives in a world of very abstruse conceptions, "heights of metaphysical argument which he scales easily and in the rare atmosphere of which he is able to sustain himself" * gives him a very unenviable position in society. For no one else wants to scale these dizzy heights, and ordinary air contains none too much oxygen for common-sense lungs. The work of the sage in this rare atmosphere is generally agreed to be the splitting of hairs and the spinning of cobwebs of "pure thought" out of his inner consciousness. What else can he do, since he has forsaken the world of facts? If philosophy can cut loose from experience, if it has any use to which to put abstract ideas and general conceptions, except to make them concrete and practical as fast as possible, why then it certainly seems to me to deserve the contempt and neglect which it now receives from so many sources.

But what is important for my present purpose is to recognize that such a conception of philosophy renders discussion impossible. The typical dealer in abstract general ideas was the New England Transcendentalist of forty years ago. A speech by Mr. Alcott or one of his disciples was (very possibly) a phenomenon similar to the biblical "gift of tongues," in which the sentences were themselves the experience, and referred to nothing beyond. It was like music:—no one was supposed to receive any definite impression, and as each had his own "gift of tongues" no discussion could take place. It was a mistake to try to get our bearings through reference to examples. There were none.

* See Mr. Lushington's introduction to Professor Ferrier's "Lectures on Greek Philosophy," p. xxiv.

I suppose this conception of philosophy has mostly died out, or at any rate become subconscious. Any "general truth" or "abstract idea" is agreed to *be about something*, and that something is the experience which the idea endeavors to convey. An example of it could always be given. Yet now and then something crops out which shows that "ideas" are still interpreted in some quarters as something else than accounts of experience. With the sterility of such philosophy as this, I am just now concerned only in so far as it makes discussion impossible. If the philosopher has not his data to interpret, as much as the student of history has, there is nothing to discuss and no way of holding the disputants together.

But does not one differ utterly and entirely from the burglar when one throws the coal-hod at him? Need one sympathize with his motives before venturing to judge them? No judgment about his motives is necessary for action. To fight the burglar or get him shut up, one need not judge his actions, nor the "opinions" or motives from which they spring. One acts against him, as one makes any quick, forced decision, under a suspension of judgment as to the precise merits of the question. We can differ, then, so far as action demands, without judging at all; but such a difference cannot be put forward as an argument. It has no claim to truth and is therefore excluded from discussion. But if we are to judge fairly we must appreciate the full force of the temptation to do or to believe any of the alternatives offered, before we can support or condemn any.

IV.

My fourth observation about the most profitable discussions is that in them the participants realize that:

"There are important views of life which we cannot hope to understand without a pretty full knowledge of their context in the life of him who holds them."

It may be thought that my frequent reference to "experience" or "facts" as contrasted with abstract, or "pure" thought, implies that I hope to separate the matter of knowledge from

its form, and get at the simple sensations or bare uncategorized data.

But I intend no such separation. By the "facts" I mean nothing more sensuous or immediate than the examples to which any truth refers and in which it is verified. In seeking to understand a companion, I simply desire to see the matter in hand as he saw it before he constructed his sentences, or made the special gestures through which it is to be conveyed to me. Now, as a piece of technique useful to accomplish this, it has seemed to me that in difficult cases, where differences of opinion are chronic and apparently incurable, nothing is so effective as an inquiry into the *natural history* and *philosophical ancestry* of the opinions concerned. If we can find out under what conditions a given belief grew up, we may, by subjecting ourselves, imaginatively or actually, to similar conditions, get a similar point of view. It is natural then to ask, "How long have you thought that? What appeared to develop the opinion? Out of what earlier opinions did it grow, and was the growth influenced by reading certain books, by intimacy with certain friends, by the experience of success, of passion, of contemplation, of grief?"

In many cases I doubt whether there is any shorter way to get at the meaning of another's views than to investigate his biography. Such helps to comprehension as are used in trying to understand an historic character are, I think, too much neglected in the case of living companions whose views we think very strange yet worth understanding. The method is slow and laborious, and perhaps rarely worth while, except from a purely psychological interest; but my point is that unless we have the opportunity for such methods of studying an opinion, we should not expect to comprehend it, and so, of course, should not be willing to differ from it.

It has been suggested in many recent philosophical discussions, and from various points of view, that beliefs are inseparable from motor attitudes,—*i.e.*, from plans of action nascent or expressed. Our ideas about fire express our knowledge about how to produce it, how to prevent its going out, how to avoid being burned, how to answer a question as to its chemical

basis. It is from this point of view that I say that it is often impossible to understand a man's beliefs without such a knowledge of his corresponding activities as would be furnished by living in the same house with him and watching his behavior in the details of practical life.

It has happened to me more than once to differ from a friend very strongly upon some philosophical question, and then to get at the whole root of the difficulty by climbing a mountain with him, trying to help him in drafting a resolution, or in managing private theatricals.

All this seems natural enough if we think of a man's opinions as an integral part of him, and not as something which can be taken off or put on like a mask. They must be affected by all he does, and, in turn, color all his actions. "Here is the most excellent gentleman in America, an old idealist, untouchably transcendental. To your amazement he thinks that it is occasionally necessary to subsidize the powers of evil. He was bred a banker. . . . What has happened to that radical that he seems to have become so moderate and reasonable? You find that for six months he has been clerk to the Civil Service Reform Club. . . . This man is an optimist. It means that he has struggled. That man is a pessimist. It means that he has shirked." *

In these quotations the opinions are, perhaps, too easily accounted for. Their source is probably not so plain as all that. Yet such a method of approaching the study of an opinion as is here suggested seems to me of the greatest value for philosophy. Men who *must* understand each other, those whose life and fortune depend upon a considerable degree of mutual comprehension, men of action and of affairs, use this method day in and day out. They could not get on without it, and I believe that if we took our philosophical labors as seriously, if we always "meant business," and desired truth not only as "good seekers" but as "*good finders*," we should never neglect investigation along this line.

* From Chapman's essay quoted above.

V.

I do not intend to say that the task of mutual comprehension is an easy one. On the contrary, I wish to emphasize its difficulties, for I think that the unprofitableness of many discussions is due to our failing to recognize how arduous it is to understand any one, and how costly of energy. As I watch men in discussion, it often seems to me that they get oblivious and their attention is distracted just when the most difficult part of the undertaking is at hand. When the differences of opinion begin to crop out, I often catch myself paying less attention and thinking chiefly of my own forthcoming retorts, instead of buckling down to the desperately hard task of interpretation and reconstruction. If an idea means more than the words that express it, it means an attitude towards life, a way of dealing with experience. To take in, assimilate, and use an idea relatively new to us is about as much of an undertaking as to learn to paint in water-colors or to run a large hotel. It means prolonged effort and skill,—skill which I may be as incapable of acquiring as of learning to jump a six-foot fence. It means a wrench and a strain of our mental ligaments, and *it hurts*. It hurts to grow, and every relatively new idea means growth. Mental habits are even harder to change than physical habits, and a new idea may mean so thorough an overhauling and rearrangement of our mental furniture that the change wracks us as abstaining from tobacco wracks an inveterate smoker. Naturally we do not care to go through such changes often; possibly we could not stand it.

As we read a new work on philosophy, we often notice that there are certain passages which stand out very clear and luminous, while others are misty and easily drop out of sight. Some of us have to go through the mortification of finding on reflection that the luminous, sensible passages were just our own old shop-worn opinions given back to us, while the misty and easily forgotten parts were those which had a message for our ignorance. We notice over and over again the familiar traits of a friend's character, the birds whose names we already

know, so that no attention is left for the new which we may need most to see.

But besides the travail of the birth of new ideas and the fatal tendency of attention to stick to the familiar and shun what we most need, there is another hinderance to our getting any new ideas,—viz., our disposition to regard anything that we don't understand as hostile and dangerous. This is not peculiar to the hide-bound conservative. Most radicals have a few favorite, weak points, about which they are solid conservatives. On these points a new idea seems to mean a charge of inefficiency. That an idea is new to us means that we have been slack in our work, and we naturally resent the imputation. Suggest to any country almshouse superintendent a cheaper method of making bread for the inmates, and nine times out of ten, even if it lessens his own work, his instinct is expressed in objection to the innovation. For besides the natural inertia towards any mental readjustment, there is a general uneasiness as to the security of his tenure of office. If one flaw can be found, why not more? This last fear has its parallel in thought. The new idea may upset the whole fabric of our personality. In simple self-defence we resist, and all our forces of resistance rush to repel the invasion, as in a child who begins to cry for the loss of his pudding, but goes on crying for all the accumulated disappointments of months. It is more than selfish conservatism. It may be a life-and-death struggle. "To take away a man's belief," said a friend of mine, "is like taking off his skin. Perhaps you can put on a better skin, but he'll die meantime."

So it happens that as new ideas rise above our mental horizon we often tend to resist them more strongly the more important they are for our development. To look away from such ideas, to dissent from them vigorously, even to feel some irritation towards them, is only to obey the natural reflex of self-preservation. But once become clearly conscious of this, and we can never do it again with the same *naïve* assurance. We begin to "discount" our own enthusiastic opposition. The clean-cut dissent that used to seem so virile, so independent and original, henceforth appears as simple

Jingoism. It is natural at certain stages of development, but it is destroyed, like any form of innocence, by clearer self-consciousness. Discussions full of vigorous self-defence and gross misunderstanding are still useful. They stimulate mental activity and develop mental muscles. Each man goes home more firmly convinced than ever of the truth of his own doctrine and the falsity of his opponent's. The increased clearness about his own views which each disputant gets through such a discussion is of value both in itself and because the clearer any one-sided view gets, the sooner the difficulties in it appear, and the more likely it is to enlarge, so as, in the long run, to include even the wicked opponent's views.

But this is a very slow and round-about process compared with the method described, by using which we spend *all* our force in trying to enlarge our views by comprehending those of our companions, instead of wasting half our strength in punishing every one who is so malicious as to differ with us.

Eighteenth century controversies on religion or on philosophy very commonly took the form of sharp, decisive collisions. Christianity was either unalloyed truth in every particular or pure superstition and fraud. A philosopher had to be either an empiricist, who denied any contribution to knowledge on the part of the mind, or a pure intuitionist, for whom ideas were wholly innate and gained nothing through the use of the senses. "Either-or," true or false, was the order of the day. This was characteristic of a time not dominated, like ours, by the idea of evolution, but prone to think of every change as essentially a revolution. On the other hand, the idea of evolution, as has been often pointed out, is a *reconciling idea*, and tends to make it possible for disputants to organize their respective fragments of truth into a whole much truer and more satisfying than any of them could have achieved alone.

I have called attention already to the fact that the evolutionary idea has already remoulded biology, history, economics, and politics, and, to a much smaller extent, philosophy. In the modern histories of philosophy it has attained firm

footing, but our current philosophical discussions still retain a surprisingly large element of eighteenth century methods.

For example, in the introduction to Professor Royce's recent book on the "Conception of God," Professor Howison says (if I understand him) that neither he, nor Professor Mezes, nor Professor LeConte has materially modified his opinion as a result of the discussion in which they took part. To me this seems as humiliating a confession as could be made. Philosophy as represented by these three writers seems to me distinctly discredited by the fact which Professor Howison so coolly states. It does not surprise him, and I suppose that few of his readers were surprised by it; but in any other department of life it would be thought a reproach to a body of workers to have to make such a confession, not because they differed, but because, apparently, they did nothing else.

VI.

I think I can make my thesis a little more clear by exemplifying its workings when applied to the method of stating an opponent's doctrine.

There is a rule observed, I think, by most fair-minded writers on non-philosophical subjects and by a few writers on philosophy (notably by Mr. Bosanquet),—viz.:

"In stating an opponent's doctrine use only such terms as you think he himself might use regarding it, or, conversely, do not put into his mouth any words which on reflection you know he would not use."

This means that we cannot paraphrase any view which has not an organic relation to our own. If we thoroughly get the opponent's view (*i.e.*, share his experience), our voice can be as well used as his in stating the case. But if we cannot make it fit the facts of experience, if we can make nothing of it, if we cannot make it work, our attempts to paraphrase it are pretty sure to be libellous and unfair. In any such case all we can do is to quote directly.

In a philosophical seminary which I recently attended, a speaker described his opponent's doctrine as "reducing every-

thing to the dead level of brute fact," or, again, as "a rigid, static world of naked fact."

Now, can any one sincerely believe that a writer would himself describe his own experience in such terms? If not, what rationality is there, what fairness in so describing it? So to state it is surely a misrepresentation of the opponent's doctrine, though it may be a correct picture of some one else's irritation and disgust. What we attempt in discussion is to get at the truth, the meaning, in one another's interpretations of our common experience, and to state this meaning. Descriptions of our own states of emotional reaction are relevant only when they are the topic under discussion. Take the sentence just quoted, "Reducing everything to the dead level of brute fact." Omit from this the expletives, the expressions of aversion, and we have left the statement that the writer under criticism "reduces everything to fact." "Fact" is often used synonymously with "reality," and one need not shudder at the charge of "reducing everything to reality."

Without the "swear-words" the statement is quite harmless.

Professor James's recent book of essays, entitled "The Will to Believe," has been to many a great source of help and enlightenment. Yet I think that the book will do its work more slowly and less thoroughly than would be the case had the writer been more sparing of philosophical expletives of the type just exemplified, and kept to the rule of stating an opponent's views in terms which the opponent would accept as fair. All through Professor James's brilliant and stirring book, whether it be in the treatment of the poor scientist of the earlier essays, or of the ossified logician, or the befuddled Hegelian of the later ones,—in each case the eighteenth century method is adopted and the opponent's views stated in terms which are bound to seem to him unfair and prejudiced. His conversion is just so much postponed.

A sneer begets a sneer. To speak of the imaginary rationalist's "snarling logically" is not likely to produce any immediate result except a snarl in return. It does not set the opponent to pondering on the error of his ways.

Contrast with this method that employed by Mr. Bosanquet in his "Psychology of the Moral Self." He is constantly obliged to differ from other writers, but never without first assimilating their views. His paraphrases and summaries would always be accepted as fair by the writers criticised.

Professor Dewey is as little of a Hedonist as Dr. Martineau. But the latter's description of Hedonistic doctrine makes it seem inconceivable that any sincere person could ever have held it,—while Professor Dewey shows how valuable a contribution the Hedonists have made to ethical theory, though he does not accept their results as the last word on the subject.

VII.

Finally, I wish to call attention to the use of certain question-begging adjectives in a way which I hope to see largely eliminated from philosophical discussion.

In characterizing another's doctrine, we should rarely, if ever, affix such adjectives as "mere," "bare," "brute," "dead," "abstract," to his expressions.

In the first place, take the word "mere." Any one who will take the trouble to notice the usage of this word as applied to an opponent's doctrine, cannot fail, I think, to be convinced that it is doing a wondrous amount of harm. It has, of course, important uses as applied to one's own doctrine, but I think I can show by a few examples that when used in characterizing an opponent's opinion it is very apt to express primarily irritation, and the attempt to ridicule, to threaten, or to embarrass, an opponent. If it does not possess these implications it is pleonastic, like any oath. It is especially scathing when coupled with such words as "brute," "bare," or "empty," "abstract," "dead." So, for example,—

A writer is discoursing on the deep wealth of the emotional life. His opponent straightway aims and discharges his heavy artillery at the absurdity, fickleness, and triviality of "mere sentiment." Of course, this is caricature and not description, for "mere sentiment" is not what is meant.

Or, again, a speaker attempts to be *consistent* and *reasonable*,

and is attacked by an opponent who says that this is all a trick of the "mere logical intellect." But this is misrepresentation, unless you can believe that the speaker will be willing *himself* to describe his remarks as expressing "mere logical intellect," which few if any would agree to do.

Critics of materialism are prone to point out the inability of "mere" atoms to make up the concrete world we know. But no man ever described his *own* materialistic opinions in terms of "mere" atoms. It is a libel. What was meant was not mere atoms, but atoms in their context of wealthy relations.

"No *mere* negation," says Professor James, in his essay on "Some Hegelianisms," "can be an instrument of a positive advance in thought." Of course Hegel would be the first to insist upon this. Nothing is more profitless than *mere* negation, unless it be *mere* assertion, and it is unfair to represent Hegel as an upholder of *mere* negation.

I have the same objection to make against such terms as "bare," "arbitrary," and "abstract," when applied in criticism of another's doctrine. Such terms seem to be making the point at issue very clear by isolating it and clearing away the *débris* about it. But, in fact, they usually have the effect of belittling a writer's meaning by misrepresenting it. Suppose you were a real estate agent and knew a rival agent to whom had been given several houses to let. Now, if before seeing any of those houses you were to describe them in conversation as "horrid, disagreeable, little houses," you would be generally thought to have done a very mean thing. Yet, supposing a certain temperament, your offence might be no greater than is committed every day by writers or speakers on philosophic questions when they speak of another's doctrine as "mere, crass materialism," or bare, abstract idealism or "pure, arbitrary freedom."

The word "abstract" is one of which I have myself been especially fond, but always, I find, in characterization of other people's ideas, never of my own. I have hurled it like an anathema at various doctrines which I could not understand. Well, I can only say that I heartily repent and am endeavoring to do so no more. I used to throw about terms

like "mere," "bare," "arbitrary," and "wilful" in the same way. But the habit of using the word "abstract" I have found an especially tenacious one, as difficult to get over as a drug habit.

Yet what, after all, are we saying of a man's statement in criticising it as "abstract"? We are saying that it is imperfect, that it does not cover the whole ground, and needs to be supplemented. But this seems to imply that a statement could be made that would not need to be supplemented, but which would cover the whole ground, and express the whole wealth of experience, which is obviously impossible. Every statement is abstract, or it would not be a statement, but a conscious universe. There is no possibility, so far as I can see, of making a statement which is not more or less one-sided. All that we can do is to show by our statement that we know there is another side,—that the story we are now telling is vitally interrelated with myriads of "*other stories*," as Kipling recognized in his favorite turn of phrase. Certainly there is a great difference between a conscious and an unconscious abstraction. It is one thing to isolate for purposes of study the physical processes and materials concerned in the making of music. Here is a conscious justifiable abstraction which one who did it might himself characterize as such. It is quite another thing to describe a string quartette as nothing but "a scraping of horses' hairs on cats' bowels." This is the attitude of special pleading,—the advocate's attitude; what philosophy calls for is the judicial attitude.

Instead of calling a doctrine abstract, why should we not begin at once by pointing out what should be added to make it truer? To call a man's idea "abstract" is a promise to tell later what they lack; similarly to call one's own stripe of idealism "a true idealism" is a promise to exhibit its convincing force later on. It is a dangerous procrastination and inertia in each case.

I have tried thus to suggest some details of the application of the method which I am describing. To eliminate such words as "mere," "bare," "abstract," and "arbitrary" from our description of others' views would, I am sure, promote

that co-operative spirit which makes discussion fruitful. Our current philosophical discussions seem to me to have too much of the competitive about them; they remind us too much of competitive debates. Such dissent as is present in really co-operative study is the kind of dissent that completes the view dissented from as contrasted with the dissent which amounts to a flat contradiction.

VIII.

It may be felt that if we give up vigorous and radical expressions of disagreement, as I have advocated, we are left with what Emerson called a "mush of concession," where every one agrees at once with whatever is said, like a shy girl at her first ball. Or one might anticipate the formation of a mutual admiration society or a group of submissive disciples around a leader. But this is as far as possible from being my meaning. The difficulty of really taking a new view into our lives makes easy acceptance as impossible as easy refutation. In either case no progress in thought is made and the primary object of discussion is missed. You end no wiser than you began. If you demolish your opponent, or agree with him from the first, nothing has been gained.

So far from desiring to eliminate differences of opinion, I desire to have them prized even more highly. They are full of new truth for us if we treat them not as ultimate ("agreeing to differ"), but as the beginning of a new insight for both sides. Dissent that asserts the incomprehensibility or total falsity of an opinion is *sterile*. But dissent that is only the prelude to a series of questions, tentative interpretations, and comparisons of experience is the most fruitful element in discussion.

Discussion can be very lively and very instructive and yet consist wholly of descriptions, tentative interpretations, and questions. If a man says that telepathy is a fact, or that we are all Hedonists or all socialists, two courses are open to us. We can agree at once, which is profitless, or we can contradict and maintain the exact opposite, which is usually as fruitless as tame agreement, though more gladiatorial and so more

entertaining. On the other hand, we may begin with questions such as "What do you *mean* by telepathy?" and go on to tentative interpretations or extensions of the view in question; then, if all attempts to get into organic relations with it fail, we can only confess that it baffles us, that it does not reach us, that we cannot get hold of it.

The upshot of my argument is this: There are two ways of approaching an opinion which differs from yours.

1. You can swear at it, smother it with expletives like "mere," "abstract," "dead," "brute," etc., or you can put down your head and butt it aside, get it out of your field of vision, so as to leave your own cherished opinion monarch of all it surveys; or,

2. You can attempt to get into relations with it, to modify and enlarge your present ideas so as to include it, the test of understanding it being your strong tendency to accept it.

The penalty of refusing to enlarge our ideas so as to include what seems at first bound to upset us, the penalty of not taking the inclusive attitude, is that we are *excluded*,—we are "*out of it*."

If we see no valuable truth in Hegel or in Herbart, we are just so far "*out of it*,"—as much as the unmusical man at a symphony. It is nothing for us. Any action based upon the attitude of total dissent is the same as an action based on total ignorance of the facts in question.

If a philosopher takes this position, he is falling back from the essentially modern co-operative method of thinking and working employed in other most highly civilized regions of life. History, literary criticism, physical science, government by discussion (instead of by arms), co-operation in all forms, the organic conception of experience of any kind,—all these have got beyond the stage of "*either-or*." Philosophy is slowly working in the same direction. Her advance will be the swifter the more she insists on pointing to specific yet common experience as the warrant and the essence of every statement.

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